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Cam.

Cambridge —
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My dear Merriam,

Thanks for your letter and the sample of Goodis's sin of covers. I would gladly wait for you two won it not that I have just hired an assistant for the winter and she wishes to begin work at once. The task I have set for this winter is a thorough recataloging of my collection and some more note-copying. You see you have led me into habits of extravagance and luxury.

After hearing your and Henshaw's objections to the high-card system of

cataloguing and weighing them carefully I am satisfied you are both wrong and that much of your objections as have real importance can be easily done away with. I think you will admit this when you hear my present plan for a card catalogue of birds. It is this.

I shall have thirty thousand cards made similar to the inclosed sample. I shall have the cat. numbers printed, running from 1 to 30,000, and the cards punched, bound in books containing one hundred cards each.

Now suppose I start for L. Umbagog and expect to collect five hundred birds there. I take five or six books of cards and use as many of them as I need. As each book is filled I write on the cover: "L. Umbagog, Maine; Coll. Wm Brewster, - 1885." That is sufficient to

fix the locality, year and collector of any specimen catalogued inside. As the catl. numbers are all printed I have only to write on each card the sex and date of capture (exclusive of year) of the specimen to which it pertains. Oh yes! then is the name of the bird besides. But this I would rather write twice than a catl. number once. On my return I have rubber stamps made for the locality, year, and collector, and cutting the tapes which bind my cards I can spread them out on a table and stamp five hundred in fifteen minutes. Then I shall put a rubber strap around them all and keep them together until I can write (or have written) the labels from them. After which they will be distributed in the systematic places in the drawers.

Surely no system of putting the data of more than one specimen on a card can have any advantages to compensate for these. Henshaw claimed for his system the undeniable advantage of having his data in vertical columns. But you will see that my present blank accomplishes this for me by simply taking all the cards pertaining to a species from their file, and laying them out on a table overlapping one another so as to conceal anything but the upper line, you have all the essential data in a vertical column. The name of the species I shall write either at the bottom of each card so that it can be thus concealed or on the back of the card when it is entirely out of the way.

I claim for this method the following advantages:

(1) The boundless flexibility of the card-catalogue system.

(2) The entire freedom from the mental strain and chance for errors inseparable from any system which requires

writing numbers consecutively. (3) Freedom from the necessity of hunting up a certain card or page when one has a specimen to enter (imagine cataloging fifty specimens of fifty different species by Henshaw's system and the trouble you would have in hunting up your fifty cards and keeping the numbers straight.) (4) The case with which you can separate and formulate the data relating to birds of any given species. (Example: Some one says the adults of a certain migratory species arrive first in autumn. You wish to test this. Separate your cards marked "adult" into one pile, those marked "juv." into another, then compare dates.) (5) The ease with which you can change the classification of your cards. (Example: The genus Otocoris a few years since included only three N. A. forms, alpestris, chrysolaema and leucolaema. Henshaw (confound him!) splits it up into nine. Now

suppose you have one hundred specimens representing all three nine forms, but catalogued under the three first names only. By my system you have only to separate your cards into nine sets, ~~cross~~ cross out the erroneous or out-of-date names, and write in the new ones, and the thing is done. By Hinshaw's system the cards relating to Clocoris must be torn up and their data copied on nine new cards.

There are other minor advantages but I trust I need not go further. Write me what you think of this matter now.

About the slips for systematic notes, journal, general observations, field-lists of species observed, etc., I have decided to adopt a uniform size of paper for all these but I have settled on a size considerably larger

than that you send. What are the advantages of having the paper correspond in size with Goode's covers? My plan is to keep my sheets (after they are filled) in indexed files. I shall not discard my library cards but shall keep them for short notes, extracts from letters, and various odds and ends; I shall file them with the larger sheets.

When I have settled all these points I intend to publish an article on the subject in the Auk. I wish I could publish it at once and wait for criticisms before having my paper made but this is out of the question.

Please show this letter to Henshaw and Goode and write me what they and you have to find fault with. I should also like to have it either kept or returned for I can use some of it, very likely, in the article above referred to.

I sent the Neotoma series last week by express to you, Jo Smithsonian. The Chipmunks entirely slipped my memory but they shall go to you this week. My girl at Highlands is only and observer & does not collect, but E. L. Boynton, Highlands, Macon Co., N. C. may help you. Write to him, mentioning my name, but don't give his address to any one, as you love me. So far he has not done much for me but he promises great things for the future. Yours William Brewster.